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SUBJECT: PRIDIYATHORN REVEALS A CABINET IN CONFUSION

REF: A. A. BANGKOK 1036
[1](#)B. B. BANGKOK 1520

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. Recently-resigned government economic czar Pridiyathorn told the Ambassador that the current government is weakly led, faction-ridden, and under threat of being replaced. While mindful of the self-serving nature, and some contradictions, in his remarks, this is more evidence of the internal problems the current government is experiencing. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On March 15, Ambassador Boyce hosted recently-resigned former Deputy Prime Minister Pridiyathorn Devakula to lunch. Pridiyathorn was extremely frank in his assessment of his former cabinet colleagues and the Byzantine politics which he claims required him to resign on February 28 (reftels).

Can,t Anyone But Me Do This Job?

[1](#)3. (SBU) He began by relating the dysfunctional nature of the cabinet, due largely to PM Surayud,s reluctance to stamp his authority on issues except those related to problems in the South or police reform. On all other issues, Pridiyathorn says, he left each minister to decide for himself how to proceed, resulting in fragmented overall policy, including the issuing of compulsory licenses by the Health Minister without consulting the rest of the cabinet. (Comment: This corresponds to what other insiders have told us. These sources cited Pridiyathorn as one of the worst offenders of non-coordination. End comment.) &I would have been more dictatorial⁸ as PM, Pridiyathorn exclaimed, &we needed complete peace of mind for a year.⁸

[1](#)4. (SBU) When Pridiyathorn was asked to join the cabinet, he apparently expected to be able to appoint all the other economic ministers in his role as overall coordinator of government economic policy. Instead, he claims that he was able to name only the ministers of commerce and energy, with others apparently named directly by Surayud at the direction of Privy Council President Prem. This lack of a well-coordinated and crafted team, the majority of whom Pridiyathorn believes were not up to the tasks at hand, is a major factor in the ineffectiveness of this government, a description Pridiyathorn readily accepted.

[1](#)5. (SBU) From the earliest stages of his time in office, Pridiyathorn said, he saw signs of weakness in the appointed government. Specifically, he mentioned that once the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) voted against passage of a new lottery law (presented by Pridiyathorn) it was evidence that the NLA &had an opposition party.⁸ This grouping was

led by Prasong Sonsiri, who had lost out in the race to become President of the NLA. Pridiyathorn blamed Surayud for not trying to stifle this opposition and for not attempting to play politics. Pridiyathorn noted that &politics were never discussed in cabinet.⁸

The Resignation

¶6. (SBU) When asked about the events that led to his resignation, Pridiyathorn said he had &facts and assumptions⁸ but seemed fairly certain he knew what had happened. As he related the story, a group led by media personality Sondhi Limthongkul, CNS General Saprang and former owner of Thai Petrochemical Industries Prachai decided to replace the current appointed government with the PM slot going to the head of the CNS, General Sonthi. Pridiyathorn described Sonthi as having been a modest soldier when the coup occurred, but with the power of his new position and with the cabal &whispering in his ear,⁸ he began to believe that perhaps he should replace Surayud. This cabal organized the entire Somkid affair (reftels) to create sufficient political turmoil to set the stage for a new government. This goal was furthered by Sondhi's on-air tirades against Pridiyathorn. Pridiyathorn was chosen as the scapegoat by the cabal because of the controversy surrounding his decisions on capital controls and Foreign Business Act amendments. In the end, the plot failed because Somkid resigned too soon for the plotters to act. Despite Somkid leaving, Pridiyathorn resigned because he felt that Surayud had not properly supported him and went back on a promise to keep Sondhi off the airwaves.

Capital Controls

BANGKOK 00001634 002 OF 002

¶7. (SBU) Pridiyathorn related his reasons for imposing harsh capital controls: a baht rising uncontrollably threatening the ability of exporters to maintain markets at a time when other policy instruments would not work.

¶8. (SBU) Looking to the future, Pridiyathorn believes a successful referendum on the constitution is dependent on ensuring the PM post is an elected, not appointed, position. He believes there is no other issue that will compel people to vote against a new constitution. As for his future, Pridiyathorn says he plans to run his boutique hotel in Chiang Rai. While he still admires PM Surayud, he believes that his weak leadership has upset even the King, and as a result Surayud will never become Privy Council President as had been expected prior to the coup.

¶9. (SBU) Comment: We take everything Pridiyathorn says with a generous serving of salt. It is not just that it is mostly self-serving but at times does not correspond to what he told us before. A small example: shortly after he took office he said that the coup leaders had asked him to be, first, PM, then when he declined because he felt he was not up to the national security aspects of the job, the generals offered and he accepted the post of Deputy PM. This time he said that Surayud was the one who invited him to join the cabinet.

¶10. (SBU) Comment continued. Despite this caveat, the picture he paints of a weak, politically confused government riven with factions in cabinet, in the CNS, and in the NLA corresponds to what is evident in the lack of results. Pridiyathorn several times expressed longing for a leader like former (appointed) PM Anand, &someone with brains to unite the people.⁸ He clearly does not see any of the current government as fitting that description. End Comment.
BOYCE